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E. De la Garza

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news release

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DE LA GARZA WINS APPROVAL OF FARM BILL PROVISIONS BENEFITING SOUTH TEXAS

For immediate release, December 21, 1990

(PR90-107)

WASHINGTON -- Although South Texas will feel the pinch from painful cuts in agricultural programs and scuttled plans to increase benefits under the food stamp program, House Agriculture Committee Chairman E (Kika) de la Garza, D-Texas, was able to win approval of several measures that should prove beneficial for both South Texas agriculture and South Texas residents.

As chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Rep. de la Garza presided over the development of the 1990 farm bill that is designed to guide U.S. agriculture and food policy over the next five years. As a South Texas congressman, Rep. de la Garza made sure that South Texas was treated fairly in the new legislation.

"The nation's budget situation made this farm bill extremely difficult to develop. We were forced by the budget process to make painful reductions in the farm programs and to drop proposed increases in food stamp benefits. Throughout the consideration of this legislation, I made sure that South Texas agriculture and the people who live in South Texas are treated as fairly and equitably as possible in this legislation," Rep. de la Garza said.

The following provisions in the 1990 farm act (P.L. 101-624) will have a specific effect on South Texas agriculture or South Texas residents:

Aflatoxin research -- A new research program is authorized to help better understand and control the presence of aflatoxin in farm commodities.

Cotton program -- Report language was included at Rep. de la Garza's insistence to give South Texas cotton producers flexibility in complying with announced acreage reduction levels so they are not unfairly disadvantaged by changes made in the new law. The following South Texas counties are listed as "early planting areas" and producers there will receive special consideration: Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, Willacy, Zapata, Wilson, Webb, LaSalle, Brooks, Jim Wells, Duval, Kenedy, Kleberg, Aransas, Live Oak, Refugio, Bee, Karnes, Goliad, Atascosa, Bexar, Dimmit, San Patricio, and Nueces.

Minority farmers -- A provision will require targeting of a specified proportion of direct operating loans made by Farmers Home Administration to help minority farmers continue to operate farms and ranches.

Colonia water and sewer assistance -- A new program, proposed by Rep. de la Garza, is established to bring adequate water and sewer services to rural communities facing health risks caused by water-related problems. Preference will be given to applicants seeking to provide water and/or waste services to rural "colonias" and their residents. The new program authorizes both grants and loans for construction and improvement of services, including assistance to eligible participants for residential hookups. Congress still needs to provide funding through the regular appropriations process.

Disaster aid for 1989 crops of sugarcane and oranges -- Rep. de la Garza won

approval of language providing equitable disaster aid treatment for producers of sugarcane and valencia orange who suffered crop losses during last year's devastating Christmas-time freeze. In the case of the sugarcane losses, USDA is required to determine the total quantity of harvest based on the quantity of "recoverable sugar." The valencia orange provision extends disaster payment coverage to the entire orange crop lost due to the 1989-1990 Christmastime freeze.

Wetland and wildlife habitat protection -- A provision, authored by Rep. de la Garza, will provide landowners cost-share assistance to preserve and enhance wetland or wildlife habitat on their land. A producer who agrees to develop and follow agricultural production activities that protect wetland or wildlife may receive up to \$1,500 each year in cost-share funding.

Farmworker disaster aid -- Rep. de la Garza successfully included a provision in the 1990 farm act authorizing \$20 million annually in grants by USDA to non-profit private or public agencies to provide emergency services to migrant and seasonal farmworkers who are unable to work due to an emergency or natural disasters.

Reducing government paperwork -- A provision, authored by Rep. de la Garza, directs USDA to develop, to the extent possible, one brief application form to be used by applicants for participation in agricultural programs.

Research on prickly pear and mesquite -- Rep. de la Garza won approval of a provision authorizing \$100,000 annually in competitive grants for mesquite research and \$100,000 for prickly pear research. Mesquite research is to be focused on wood processing techniques, and tree management. Prickly pear research is to be focused on developing the plant as a food source.

North American free trade study -- Rep. de la Garza was the author of a provision requiring a USDA study of the impact of a potential North American free trade area, including a U.S-Mexico free trade area, on the U.S. agricultural economy. This study must be submitted by March 31, 1991.

Employment and training allocation for Texas -- Rep. de la Garza was instrumental in updating the formula by which state allocations of employment and training funds under the Food Stamp program are made. Under the new formula, the state of Texas should see its allocation increase from the current \$5.2 million to \$6.7 million in fiscal 1993.

Food stamp participation -- To ensure that language is not a barrier to applying for benefits, an outreach demonstration project, authored by Rep. de la Garza, is authorized to evaluate ways to increase the participation of low-income, non-English speaking families in the food stamp program.

Winegrape industry study -- Rep. de la Garza won approval of a provision directing USDA to conduct a study on how the agency can best work with and support the U.S. winegrape industry, with a special emphasis on non-traditional grape-growing areas (such as Texas).

1990 disaster assistance program authorized -- Rep. de la Garza was instrumental in gaining approval of a farm bill provision that authorizes a comprehensive crop disaster program for 1990 crop losses similar to the 1989 program. However, due to Federal budget constraints, this provision must await congressional appropriations before it becomes effective. In addition, language was included to allow Farmers Home Administration to offer emergency disaster loans to eligible producers in areas where crop insurance was available.